ROCK-CUT TEMPLES

OF INDIA

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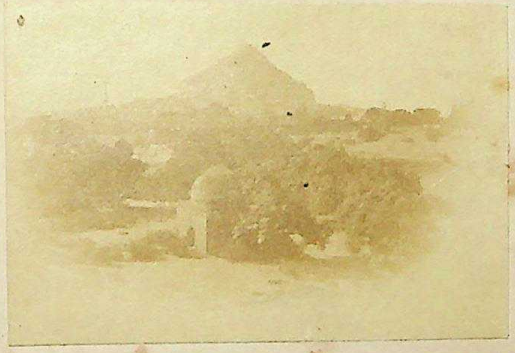
THE ROCK-CUT

TEMPLES OF INDIA

ILLUSTRATED BY SEVENTY-FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN ON THE SPOT BY MAJOR GILL

DESCRIBED BY JAMES FERGUSSON, F.R.S. M.R.A.S



ROCK-CUT FORTRESS OF DOWLUTABAD.

CHOWKHAMBA SANSKRIT SERIES OFFICE
VARANASI

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1864.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY R. CLAY, SON, AND TAYLOR.

PREFACE.

DURING a lengthened residence in India it was my good fortune to be able to visit in succession all the principal groups of Rock-cut Temples which were then known to exist in that country.

In 1836 those of Cuttack were first examined. In 1838 an extended tour was made for the purpose of exploring those of Western India, and in 1841 the investigation was completed by a visit to those of Mahavellipore, in the Madras Presidency The intervals that elapsed between these several dates were useful for correcting the vagueness of first impressions, and in enabling me to fill up the gaps in my knowledge of Indian architecture, by examining cotemporary structural buildings, and studying other cognate sources of information.

The results of these investigations were embodied in a paper which was read to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1843, and published in the Eighth Volume of its Journal.

This paper was afterwards republished in 1845, accompanied by nineteen lithographic plates, in folio, illustrating the principal types of Rock-cut Architecture in India.

In consequence of the interest which these publications excited among those interested in the study of Indian Antiquities, a memorial was addressed to the Court of Directors of the East India Company, praying them to take steps to prevent further desecration and destruction of these venerable monuments of the past, and above all to appoint some one to make drawings of the fast perishing Frescoes of Ajunta, before decay and the recklessness of Tourists had entirely obliterated them.

One result of these representations was, that Captain,—now Major Gill, was appointed to copy the paintings in Ajunta; a task for which he proved himself thoroughly competent, by the artistic skill displayed in the copies of these paintings which he has sent home, as well as by the truthfulness and fidelity which pervade all he has done.

The pictures sent home by Major Gill during the first few years of his residence at Ajunta are now exhibited in the Indian Court of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, and convey a perfect idea of the style of the paintings at Ajunta; but unfortunately they have not been accompanied by any explanation, or any indication of the localities in which they are found. The only attempt to elucidate their history, which has yet been published, will be found in Mrs. Spier's "Life in Ancient India," published in 1856.

For many years past no further drawings have reached this country, but instead, Major Gill sent home in the spring of this year to Mr. Layard nearly two hundred stereoscopic views of Indian subjects.

About one-half these were scenes of the chase, of Indian life, and illustrations of the Mahometan buildings and of the scenery in the neighbourhood of Ajunta. Of the remaining half, many were duplicates, but those forming the illustrations of the present volume, have been selected as being all those in the collection which could fairly be considered as representing Rock-cut Architecture.

The text which accompanies them is not intended to be a complete and scientific elucidation of the subject. Those who desire fuller information are referred to the works mentioned above: but it is hoped that it is sufficient to render the subject of each Photograph intelligible. This seems to be all that is necessary, for the Photographs tell their own story far more clearly than any form of words that could be devised, and even without the text they form by far the most perfect and satisfactory illustration of the ancient architecture of India which has yet been presented to the Public.

JAMES FERGUSSON.

20, LANGHAM PLACE,
October, 1863.

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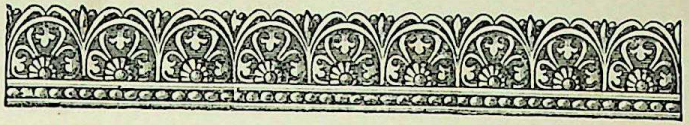

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE are few among the monuments of antiquity regarding whose history or uses so much uncertainty prevailed, till a very recent period, as those known as the rock-cut temples of India. When Europeans first became acquainted with them, they were so struck by their monolithic grandeur, and the apparent eternity of duration that resulted from it, that they jumped at once to the conclusion that they must be among the most ancient monuments of the world, rivalling in this respect, as was then supposed, even those of Egypt. There was also a mystery hanging over their deserted condition, added to the fact that almost all of them were situated in remote and lonely valleys, or cut into the bare mountain-side; which, with other circumstances, conspired to render them the most attractive, as they certainly were the grandest, relics of the arts of the ancient Hindoo races.

In consequence of all this, the wildest theories were adopted with regard to their antiquity and the purposes for which they were originally intended. These might have continued in vogue till the present day had not James Prinsep, between the years 1830 and 1840, opened a new era in our knowledge of Indian antiquities, and introduced new modes of investigation, which soon led to most important results.

Among the first fruits of his labours was the decipherment of the Great Buddhist inscriptions, which exist all over Northern India, from beyond the Indus at Kapur di Giri to the shores of the Bay of Bengal at Cuttack.

This discovery led to a thorough investigation of the Buddhist literature of Ceylon by the Hon. Mr. Turnour, and the consequent fixation of the date of the birth of Sakya Muni, the founder of that faith, in or about the year 623 B.C., and of his death eighty years later, in 543. It was also then ascertained that Buddhism did not become a prevalent, still less a state religion, till 300 years afterwards, in the reign of Asoka. As all the earlier excavations belong to this faith, an initial date was thus obtained, beyond which it was impossible to carry back the antiquity of any of the rock-cut temples then known or since brought to light. Subsequent researches have more and more confirmed the conclusions then arrived at; and there seems no reason for doubting but that the whole series of Indian Rock-cut Temples were excavated in the fourteen centuries which elapsed between the time when Dasaratha, the grandson of Asoka, excavated the "Milkmaid's Cave" in Behar, about 200 years B.C., and the completion of the Indra Subha by Indradyumna at Ellora, in the twelfth century after our era.

As might naturally be expected from their locality, the oldest group of these caves is that at Raja Griha in Behar, being close to the original seat of Buddhism, and where it first rose into importance. They extend from 200 B.C. to the destruction of the Andhra dynasty in the fifth century of our era.

Next to these is the Cuttack series, beginning about the same time, but ending earlier in so far as Buddhism is concerned, but continued through a Jaina series of much more modern date. These are the only two groups known to exist in Bengal.

On the western side of India, the Cave at Karli is apparently not only the oldest, but the finest known to exist. It is situated on what is now, and probably was then, the great highroad between the plains of the Deccan and the Harbour of Bombay, which we know to have been an important Buddhist locality, from the number of caves that still exist around it. But the most complete and interesting series known is that of Ajunta, which are fully illustrated in this volume. They extend from the first century B.C. to the tenth or eleventh A.D. and present every variety of style of Buddhist art prevalent in India during that important period.

Next in importance to these is the well-known group at Ellora,

consisting of three series:—First, a Buddhist group, which may probably be as old as the seventh, but more probably belongs to the eighth or ninth, century. After these comes a Hindoo series, lasting through the next two or three centuries, and closing with a Jaina group of the eleventh or twelfth. They form thus a singular contrast with those at Ajunta, where all belong to one religion; though it may be a question whether the variety of the one series is not as interesting as the uniformity of the other.

Besides this, there is a very important and interesting series of caves at Kennari in the island of Salsette, in Bombay Harbour—wholly Buddhist, and of various ages—and the well-known Hindoo cave of Elephanta, of the eighth or ninth century.

In the Ghâts above Bombay there is another important series, at Juneer; a Buddhist group at Baug, in Malwa; and one partly Buddhist and partly Brahmanical at Dhumnar, and several others less known, and which yet remain to be examined and described.

Only one important group is known to exist in the Madras Presidency, that at Mahavellipore, on the coast, south of Madras. They are comparatively modern, and may be as late as the thirteenth century of our era. They present a curious mixture of Brahmanical and Buddhist forms of architecture, but cannot bear comparison either in extent or interest with those existing in the Bengal or Bombay Presidencies.

Altogether, it has been calculated there may be in India 1,000 excavations of this class—nine-tenths of which are Buddhist, and the remaining 100 divided between the Brahmanical and Jaina religions. They thus form not only the most numerous, but the most interesting series of architectural remains existing in India before the Mahomedan Conquest. In fact, they are the only ones that serve to illustrate the Arts or History of the period to which they belong. The structural monuments erected during the early centuries of our era are scarce and widely scattered over the whole area of the country, and few even of these are in the state in which they were originally erected; whereas one of the great merits of cave architecture is that it remains unchanged and unchangeable during the whole period of its existence.

In order to understand what has just been said and a grea deal of what is to follow, it is necessary to bear in mind that three

great phases of religious faith have succeeded one another in India in historical times. The first was that of the immigrating Aryans—an elemental fire-worship, as far removed from superstition or idolatry as any human faith well can be. We know it only from the Vedas, and from its analogy with the fire-worship of the ancient Persians; for no stranger visited India during its prevalence who has left us an account of what he saw, and no monument or material records remain by which it could be judged. We have every reason, however, to suppose that it continued pure and undefiled till the period when it was superseded by Buddhism, some three centuries before our era.

We have only slight means of guessing what the religion of the aboriginal Indians may have been in early times, but it seems clear that Buddhism was little else than a raising up of the aboriginal casteless Hindoos to a temporary supremacy over the aristocratic Aryans. When Buddhism broke down in India, of which we have symptoms as early as the sixth century A.D., it was succeeded in some parts of Western India by the religion of Jaina; a form of faith that may have existed in obscurity contemporaneously with the other, but only came to light on its extinction.

What really replaced it, however, was the modern Brahmanical worship of Siva and Vishnu. This was apparently the religion of some of the original inhabitants of the country with whom the effete remnant of the old Brahmanical Aryans allied themselves, in order to overthrow the Buddhists. In this they succeeded; but this most unholy alliance has given birth to one of the most monstrous superstitions the world now knows, but which generally prevails at the present day over the whole peninsula of India.

So far as we know, the Aryans built no permanent buildings in India. Their pure religion required no stately ceremonies, and consequently no temples. The climate is so temperate, that palatial structures were only necessary for the display of passing pageantry; and it also happens that where races of men are not in the habit of building temples or tombs, their residences are more remarkable for temporary convenience than they are for permanent magnificence.

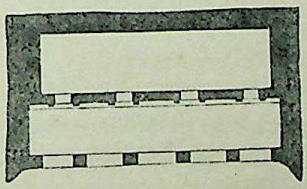
Architectural magnificence was, on the contrary, a necessity

with the Turanian natives ; and one of the most interesting points brought out by the study of the caves is the fact, that the earliest are mere petrifactions of wooden buildings. The mortices, the tenons, and every form of wooden construction, is repeated in the rock in the earliest caves ; and frequently even the woodwork still remains as if placed there to support the mountain, instead of being merely intended to recall the structure of the metal covered or boarded roof from which it was copied.

The same thing occurred in Lycia, where all the earliest tombs are in like manner repetitions in stone of wooden structures, and in both instances it appears that it was the Greeks who taught the natives how to use the more permanent materials. At all events, the earliest monuments we know in India, the lâts of Asoka, are adorned with Greek ornaments, evidently borrowed from the Bactrian Greeks of Central Asia, and in the earlier caves there is not one single form that suggests lithic architecture; every form is essentially wooden, and frequently interchanging with wood itself.

All the Buddhist caves we know of belong to one of two classes. They are either Viharas or Monasteries, or they are Chaitya caves or churches,—the former being, as might be expected, by far the most numerous. The oldest Viharas consist of one cell only ; little hermitages, in fact, for the residence of a

Fig. 1.

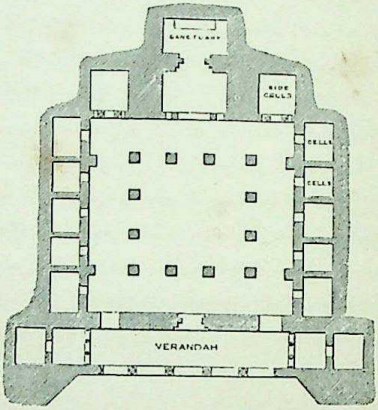


PLAN OF VIHARA AT UDYAGIRI. SCALE 25 FEET TO 1 INCH.

single ascetic. In the next class they were extended to a long verandah, with one long cell behind it, as in the example, Fig. 1. As these had, however, several doors opening outwards, they probably were divided by partitions into cells internally.

In the third, and by far the most numerous class, Fig. 2, the cell expands into a hall, generally with pillars in the centre; and around this the cells of the monks are arranged, the abbot or prior generally occupying cells at either end of the verandah.

Fig. 2.



PLAN OF VIHARA NO. 2. AT AJUNTA. SCALE 50 FEET TO 1 INCH

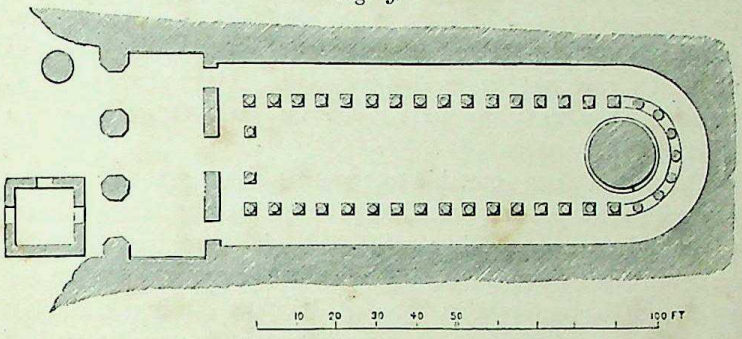
In ancient times, no sculpture or images were introduced into the Viharas; but as early, certainly, as the first or second century of our era we find a chapel always facing the principal entrance, and in it an image of Buddha: afterwards side chapels were added, with images of saints; and in those groups of caves which had no Chaitya cave attached to them we find a dagopa, or stone altar, occupying the chapel in the centre.

Chaitya caves, on the contrary, are always exclusively devoted to ceremonial worship, and in every feature correspond with the choir of a Romanesque or Basilican church, the climate apparently enabling them to dispense with the nave, or place of assembly for the laity. As mentioned above, the typical example of this class is the great cave of Karli, of which is represented in plan on woodcut Fig. 3.

Externally there was always a porch or music gallery, more or less developed; within this, a feature corresponding with our rood-screen. This is always covered with sculpture, and access

was obtained to the choir through one or three doors with which it was pierced. Internally, over the entrance, is the part corresponding with the rood-loft, and over this is the great window or chancel arch, through which light is admitted to the building.

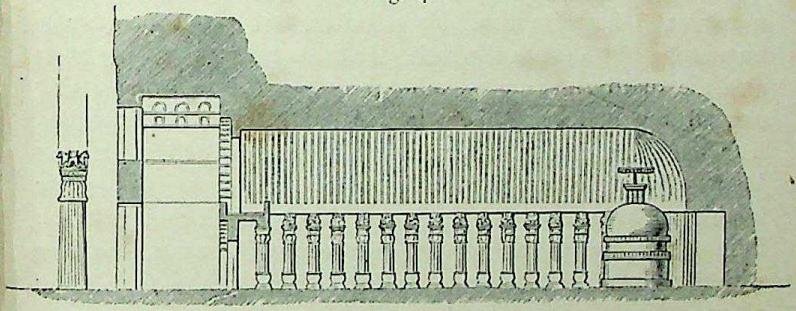
Fig. 3.



PLAN OF THE CHAITYA CAVE AT KARLI.

The end, opposite the entrance, always terminates in an apse, the centre of which is occupied by the dagopa, or stone altar, a simulated tomb, containing, or supposed to contain, a relic of Buddha, or of some of his saints.

Fig. 4.



SECTION OF THE CHAITYA CAVE AT KARLI.

The whole is always surrounded by an aisle or procession path, separated from the choir by a range of pillars; over that is generally a triforium belt, not pierced, but ornamented either by painting or sculpture. From this belt springs the semicircular roof. In the oldest Chaityas, this was always ornamented with wooden ribs attached to the rock, and at Karli, woodcut Fig. 4,

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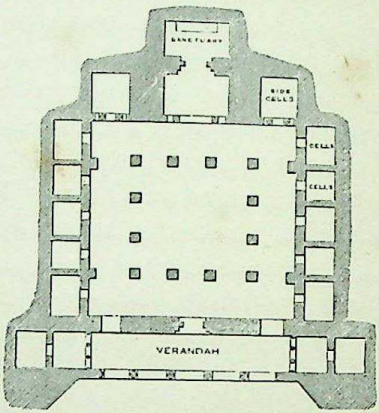

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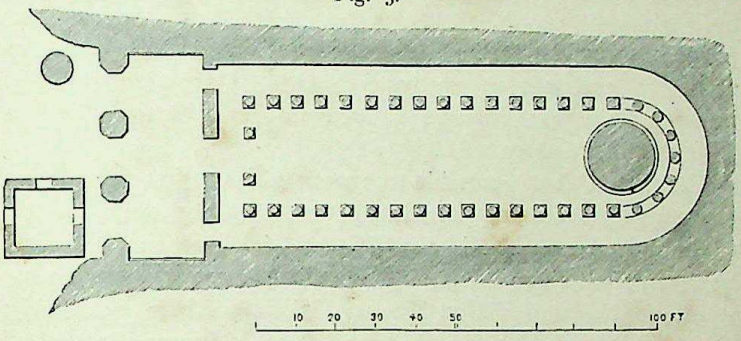

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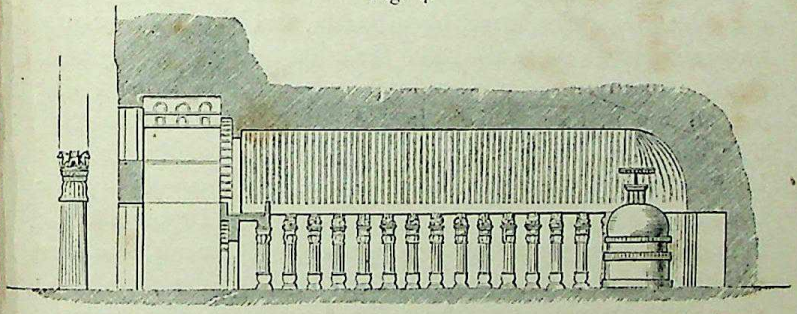

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these still remain. At Kennari, the wooden tenons still stick in the rock; but in most cases they are replaced by stone ribs cut out of the rock.

As the Brahmans excavated caves only in order to signalize their triumph over their enemies the Buddhists, and had no real purpose to guide them, their excavations are more varied in character, and not so easily classified. Generally speaking, however, they too may be divided into two classes—Pseudo Viharas and Temples.

The first of these resemble true monasteries at first sight, being caves with flat roofs supported by pillars, sometimes nearly similar to Buddhist excavations in arrangement. They are distinguished, however, from these, by having no cells or any arrangements for residence, the wall spaces between the pillars being invariably occupied by sculpture or niches for its reception; and instead of the chapel, or dagopa, there is generally either a small temple or a figure of Siva or Vishnu. Even without sculpture, however, there are peculiarities of plan in Brahmanical excavations which at once betray their origin to any one familiar with the architectural arrangement of Buddhist Viharas.

The Brahmanical temples are still more unlike the Buddhist examples, as these are invariably exteriors, and have consequently no meaning when cut in the rock. In almost every case they have also the disadvantage of standing in a pit, the rock being dug out all round, leaving them in the midst of the excavation. The one exception to this rule is the example of the Raths at Mahavellipore. There the Brahmans found a group of granite boulders lying on the seashore, and have carved them into the form of temples, having all the appearance of structural edifices with the advantage of monolithic durability; but the parts being all copied from edifices constructed with small stones, no apparent grandeur of effect results from this cause. The Kylas at Ellora and the temple at Dhumnar are, on the contrary, hid from view externally, and when looked at from above lose half the effect due to their dimensions. When standing in the pit, however, and looking up at them, there is something in the seclusion, and an effect of eternity in the simple wall of rock enclosing the richly-carved temple, which goes far to redeem these faults, and renders

them, on the whole, much more impressive than structural temples of even greatly increased dimensions.

The Jaina temples are so few as hardly to require classification, and have no architectural peculiarities by which they can be distinguished. Their arrangements partake principally of that of the Brahmanical caves; indeed, it is only by their sculpture that they can be distinguished from them. They are interesting, however, from the circumstance of their belonging to the most florid period of Hindoo art; and they were also fortunate in being excavated at a time when even the Brahmans had become so familiar with monolithic architecture as to have abandoned most of the faults inherent in direct imitation of structural edifices.

It is in vain now to speculate on what may first have induced the inhabitants of Behar to excavate temples in the hard granite rocks of their country, or those of Cuttack in the coarse sandstone of Khandagiri. It may have been a familiarity with those of Egypt, as we know from his inscriptions, that Asoka had formed alliances with Ptolemy of Egypt, and Megas, probably of Cyrene; and to a people wholly without permanent monuments as the Hindoos then were, the temptation to imitate the rock-cut monuments of these countries was great. What, however, really led to their ultimate extension was the singularly favourable nature of the rocks in Western India for the purpose.

From the valley of the Nerbudda to that of the Kistnah, the whole country consists of horizontally stratified trap rocks perfectly homogeneous in character. Occasionally, however, strata intervene of harder texture than the rest, giving that curious steplike character which distinguishes the hill forts of India. Whether harder or softer, it is free from faults and cracks, and so uniform in character, that the architect feels the most perfect confidence in finding a suitable material, however deeply he may penetrate.

The Tapty is one of the few streams which have cut through the upper crust of this formation, and opened for itself a deep and wide valley through it, pursuing a western course. On either side of this great valley numerous ravines or cracks extend for some miles into the plateau.

It is in one of these ravines, on the southern side of the valley of the Tapty, about three miles from the outer edge or ghât, that the Caves of Ajunta are situated.

In order to render the following description of these caves intelligible, it is necessary, before proceeding further, to explain how the numbers by which they are known came to be attached to them. When I visited the caves in 1839, some of them had names, but such as neither indicated their age nor the purposes for which they were excavated, and these were applied so loosely that the guides frequently gave the same name first to one cave and then to another. To avoid all difficulty, I numbered them like houses in a street, beginning with the most northern, or the cave furthest down the stream, and proceeded to No. 27, the last accessible cave at the southern end.

According to this arrangement, the oldest group consists of the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th, and the series becomes more and more modern very nearly in the exact ratio on which it diverges on either hand from this central group. Thus the group from No. 13 to No. 19 comes next in age, and beyond these the northern Caves, Nos. 1 to 7; and the southern, Nos. 20 to 27, are probably cotemporary or nearly so. The earliest Viharas, Nos. 11 and 12, were probably excavated in the century which preceded the Christian era—they may be older; while the excavation of No. 1 and No. 26 probably did not long precede the first Mahomedan Conquest.

It may also be remarked, that Nos. 9, 10, 19, and 26 are Chaitya, or Church caves; the remaining twenty-three are Viharas. There are no Brahmanical caves at Ajunta, but some sculpture that approaches very nearly to that religion in character, and may have been excavated either after the caves were abandoned by their original occupants, or during some period of temporary supremacy.

THE

CAVES OF AJUNTA.

State Museum Library
Lucknow

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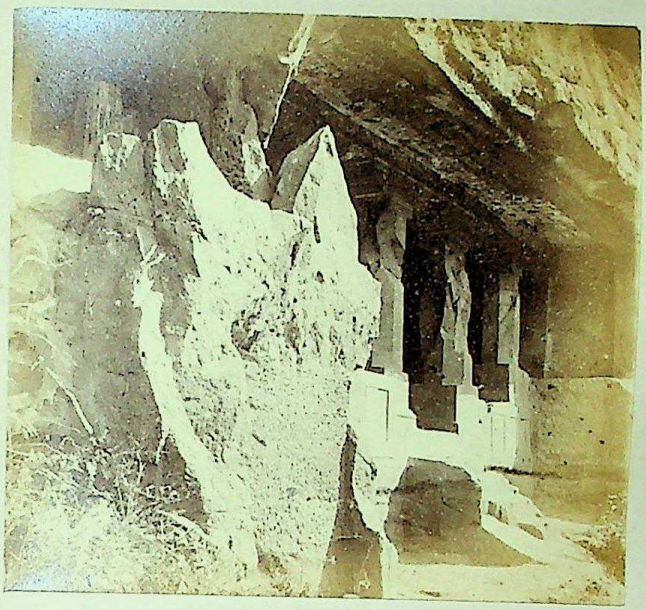
HEAD OF RAVINE.—AJUNTA.

THE town of Ajunta is situated on the level of the plains of the Deccan, on the top of the Ghat. The Caves are situated about 200 feet lower down, at the bottom of a second stratum of the trap rocks. Half way between them a platform of harder rock divides the height into two nearly equal strata of 100 feet each.

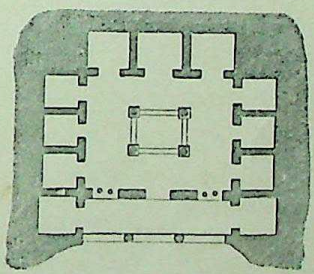
After leaping over the two artificial obstructions shewn in the last view, the river descends by numerous small falls through the first stratum in a course of about two miles long. It then reaches the edge of the lower platform, over which it falls by seven short leaps, in a narrow space just to the right of the rocks shown in the view, which close the upper end of the lower ravine.



VIHARA No. 11, AT AJUNTA.

NEXT in age to the last described is No. 11, very similar to the last in interior arrangement, but rather smaller, its length being 37 feet, its width only 28 feet 6 inches. Notwithstanding this it has four pillars supporting the roof, very clumsily introduced, and probably the first example of supports being so used, though afterwards their introduction became the rule, not the exception.

The external façade is plain, but in good taste, consisting of four plain octagonal piers with bracket capitals, standing in a plain panelled stylobate approached by a flight of steps; the whole design being very appropriate to its position.



PLAN OF VIHARA NO. 11.
SCALE 50 FEET TO 1 INCH.

VERANDAH OF CAVE No. 11.—AJUNTA.

INTERNALLY the roof of the verandah has been painted, though probably at an age subsequent to the excavation, and is now very much obliterated. Its paintings, however, possess no historical interest, as they consist only of architectural patterns and borders, exhibiting what might be called a mixture of Classic and Assyrian designs.

The doorway leading to the interior is simple, and the steps are adorned with two lions' heads of good design, and well executed.

On either side is a large square window, separated into three lights by two pillars standing on the cills. These are square for the greater part of their height, but change into octagons and then into figures of sixteen sides, returning to the square form just below the capitals. This being to a greater or less extent the mode of decoration adopted for all pillars, not only at Ajunta, but in every part of India, so long as anything like a pure Hindoo style prevailed.

THE

CAVES OF ELLORA.

INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH the caves at Ellora do not possess that unity and completeness which characterises those of Ajunta, their variety, and the exceptional magnificence of some of them, renders them perhaps even more interesting: but it must be confessed they are in consequence far more difficult to understand. It is only, indeed, after having become familiar with all the other forms of Cave architecture, that their history becomes at all intelligible.

It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that such strange theories were announced with regard to their age and uses when they were first made known to Europeans; for, beside their complexity, it also happened that the Ellora Caves were the earliest series of which any trustworthy illustrations were published, and they consequently attracted attention at a time when very few materials existed for forming a judgment regarding their peculiarities. Very correct views of them were published by the Daniels, from drawings made by Wales, in the first years of this century; and the writings of Seely, of Colonel Sykes, and Sir Charles Mallet, have all contributed to make them known; but unfortunately none of these gentlemen were familiar—at the time they wrote—with the other forms of Cave architecture, and they were consequently unable to classify them correctly as to either age or style.

The whole series consists of about thirty excavations. Of these ten were devoted to the religion of Buddha, fourteen were excavated by the followers of the Brahmanical creeds, and six cannot be said to belong to either of these sects; nor can they in strictness be ascribed to the Jains, though their sculpture savours more of the tenets of their religion than those of the other two.

Architecturally the Ellora Caves differ from those of Ajunta in consequence of their being excavated in the sloping sides of a hill, and not in a nearly perpendicular cliff. From this formation of the ground almost all the caves at Ellora have courtyards in front of them. Frequently also, an outer wall of rock with an entrance through it is left standing, so that the caves are not generally seen from the outside at all, and a person might pass along their front without being aware of their existence unless warned of the fact. On the other hand, the advantage architecturally of the fore-court, and the protection it affords not only from violence, but also from atmospheric influences, more than compensate for this defect.

ROCK-CUT TEMPLES

OF INDIA